

The Influences of Work-Related Stress in Determining Work Performance among Language Lecturers' in Public Universities

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Abstract

Lecturers' increased workload is an issue that has not been widely discussed even though it has emotionally affected the lecturers and eventually influences their work productivity. Therefore, this study is conducted to identify the factors that lead to poor work performance among 113 language lecturers in three Malaysian public universities through a random sampling Likert scale survey. From literature review, it has been found that there is significant positive relationship between all variables (heavy and increased workload, grade promotion, additional working hours and large group of students per lecturer in a classroom) and lecturers' work performance.

Keywords: Workload, Work Performance, Stress, Language Lecturer.

Introduction

The increasing workload assigned to lecturers has been rather a controversial issue as they are expected to do more than teaching and supervising the students but at the same time to also participate in seminars, workshops and community service as well as research workload. Needless to say, these are the requirements for grade promotion in the tertiary institutions. Lecturers do not only need to prepare for pedagogy and methodology but the lecturing process also includes examining student's performance and supervision of projects carried

out by students (Philips & Okonmah, 2020). An article that went viral on social media in 2020, “Bahagiakah Seorang Pensyarah? (Is being a lecturer fulfilling?)”, written by a lecturer from the Research Centre for Dakwah and Leadership, National University of Malaysia, emphasised on the challenges that lecturers in both public and private tertiary institutions are facing nowadays. In this article, Associate Professor Dr. Salasiah Hanin Hamjah stated that current lecturers are hampered with increased workload and wider job scopes in order to receive a grade promotion. Due to these demands, the lecturers are finding it more difficult to focus on the main task which is the teaching process and eventually may affect their teaching and students’ learning quality. Hence, this study investigates the factors that influence lecturers’ work performance in order to attain a high educational impact on the stakeholders (Azman et. al., 2016).

Literature Review

In any tertiary institutions, lecturers are often entrusted with tasks that become a factor in their work performance appraisal. Certainly, fulfilling the assigned workload is a criterion for work performance appraisal (Hasibuan, 1990). According to Cherniss and Goleman (2001), individual work performance has been proven to improve group performance and ultimately the efficacy of the organization. In addition, it is also found that work performance significantly influence the results or success of an organization (Benjamin & Olajumoke, 2013). Thus, work performance is described by the quality and productivity of work and lecturers who have a laden of workload may feel burdensome as they often need to complete the tasks after office hours. An individual’s contentment is measured not by the material needs but is based on positive emotions, involvement in teaching activities, social interactions and real life meaning (Awang & Ahmad, 2010).

The challenges experienced by lecturers nowadays include equipping themselves with information and communication technological skills, soft skills, effective university management skills and at the same time to become the beacon of hope to uplift the society. In the past, lecturers focused mainly on teaching and supervising students and being involved in community service, but now the scope of work of lecturers is augmented by their involvement in research. Moreover, the challenge in attaining grade promotion is another factor that influence lecturers’ credibility when carrying out these assigned tasks (Mahmood, 2018). In order to reach the annual Key Performance Indicator (KPI) established by the universities (Omar & Azim, 2019), lecturers are also required to produce research articles to be published in SCOPUS/WoS/ERA/MyCite journals. This requirement demands a variety of multitasking skills and has overwhelmed the lecturers. In a nutshell, lecturers are burdened with increasingly challenging tasks in this generation (Hamjah, 2020).

According to Rahim (2000), the dissatisfaction among lecturers exists due to the increased workload and a myriad of expectations. Since teaching performance and workload are interrelated (Azman et al., 2016), from an ergonomic perspective, each workload received by a person must be appropriate and in line with their physical and cognitive abilities and limits (Pracinasari, 2013). On the other hand, Chaudhry et al (2011) stated that there is a positive relationship between the workload of a lecturer with his work performance because it can improve the knowledge, skills and experience of lecturers, where indirectly can improve organizational performance. Nevertheless, Gahlann (2014); Rahim (2012); Zhou and George (2001) have rejected this notion. They pointed out that there is no positive relationship

between excessive workload and work performance because such a situation will affect the emotions and motivation of lecturers, arise dissatisfaction with the organization and in turn impact on work productivity.

In addition, lecturers are also burdened with co-curricular and student societies duties as advisors, examining assessments and evaluating student work, performing clerical duties, conducting college meetings and programs as well as handling non-professional duties. Lecturers are also expected to attend meetings, invigilate examinations, participate in various workshops and partake official duty in institutional activities such as convocations and community service have caused lecturers to experience emotional stress (Sarif et al., 2017). Should they fail in managing their stress, the relationship between the lecturers and their colleagues, organizations and students may be affected and consequently affect their teaching and learning quality too (Sipon, 2007). The decreased productivity of the teaching process due to emotional stress which has a significant impact on the performance and motivation of lecturers (Tambi & Awang, 2019). This phenomenon has also prompted many lecturers to switch professions or opt for early retirement. According to Othman and Omar (2014), work pressure can lead to self-resentment over the work done and the avoidance and neglect of work which eventually form a desire to leave the profession. This situation indirectly affects the quality of education as well as the profession of lecturers, further hampering the endeavours to develop graduates who are capable in various fields.

Another element that contributes to work pressure is the insufficient time allotted for a task completion. This situation causes lecturers to feel distressed if the task outcome does not meet the expected quality due to short deadlines (Rahim, 2012; Othman, 2014). Any activities performed beyond anyone's ability will expedite a decline in work quality and productivity (Pracinasari, 2013; Markom et al., 2011) and in turn impact physical and mental health negatively. Hence, Nelms (1993), as cited by Othman and Omar (2014), suggests that lecturers' working hours should be only 35 hours weekly even if it is not enough to complete the assigned tasks. Lecturers should not be burdened with university-related tasks outside the working hours as they also need to spend quality time with family as well as performing personal needs.

Furthermore, the increasing number of students accepted to the higher learning institutions every year creates an imbalance between the number of lecturers and students (Yusof & Sulaiman, 2012). A study by Collin and Parry-Johnes (2000) further explains that there is an imbalance between the number of lecturers and students in universities and this in turn increases the lecturers' workload and reduces their happiness level due to stress and increased working hour. The findings of this study are consistent with the study by Tambi & Awang (2019) who found that the work stress factor dealing with students recorded the highest mean value which affected the emotional level of 108 lecturers and in turn affecting their work quality. Certainly the aspect of motivation should also be taken into account to avoid a decline in interest to remain working in the higher learning institutions.

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Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 showed the conceptual framework for this study that illustrate the factors' of work-related stress in determining lecturers' work performance.

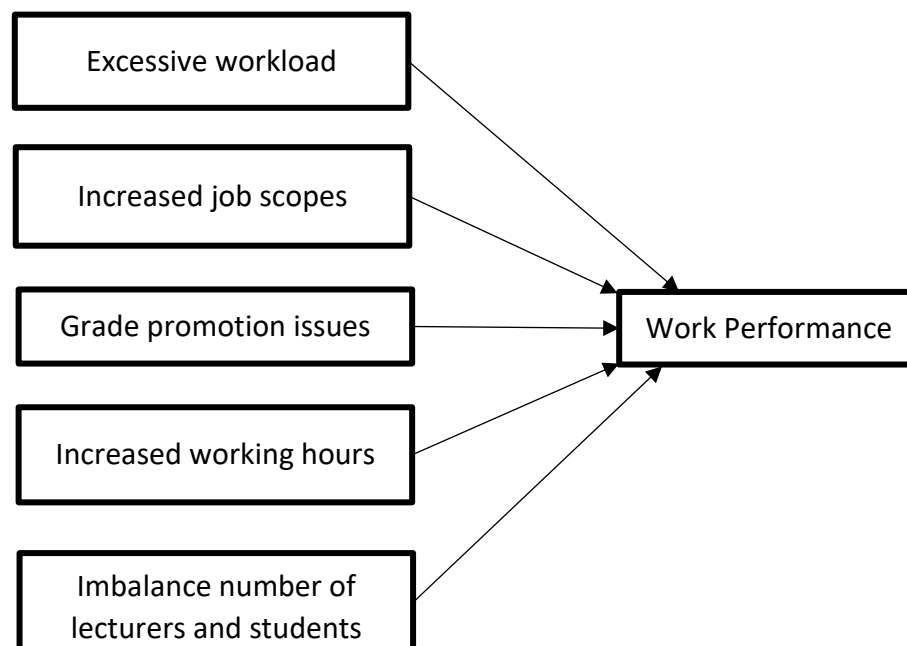


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (source by author, 2021).

Methodology

This study adopts cross-sectional survey method on the sample from the entire population of language lecturers from Malaysian public universities to describe the opinions, behaviours and characteristics of the population subjects (Creswell, 2012). This survey method is chosen due to its suitability and accessibility for various topics and it provides specific explanation for the sample properties (Darusalam & Husin 2018). The sampling method in this study uses simple random sampling and to determine the sample size, GPower Calculation 3.1 software is used to obtain the minimum sample size which is 107. Since the actual sample of the study is 113, then the minimum conditions of analysis are complied.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to identify the factors that influence the decline in language lecturers' work performance. This study aims to provide positive and beneficial impacts not only to lecturers, as well as to prompt changes to be taken by the institutions while providing relevant ideas for researchers to do further research. The completion of this study can also assist the institutions to recognise the lecturers' emotional impact on their work performance. Besides that, the findings may also emphasise the importance of lecturers' well-being in increasing their work productivity which will benefit both the institutions and stakeholders.

Therefore, a further study should be conducted to investigate the motivational steps taken by the lecturers in overcoming excessive workload in higher learning institutions. Through similar research, it will also enable the lecturers to understand the shortcomings related to the job scope as well as the positive steps to enlighten the issues by reviewing their working strategies and capabilities.

Conclusion

The policy of the Ministry of Higher Education emphasises on improving the quality of education, thus, the lecturers' duties are also increasing in line with the efforts to improve the performance of the higher learning institutions, especially in achieving international standards. Due to this reason, the lecturers must keep a stable level of motivation and emotional well-being as highly motivated lecturers are more enthusiastic and success driven in fulfilling their tasks (Carver, 2003). On the other hand, emotional stress causes lecturers to lose self-confidence and focus, become easily irritated and eventually making them less motivated to work (Jasmi et al., 2010). However, the globalisation era demands lecturers to move in sync in both self-development and professional development regardless the constant changes in the field of education. This situation indirectly drags lecturers with various challenging and heavy tasks which in turn causes them to be increasingly burdened with work (Rahim, 2012).

Thus, the element of motivation is needed to restore the lecturers' emotional stability and positive outlook towards this profession. Without motivation, lecturers find it difficult to achieve satisfaction in their careers and to meet the needs of the institutions in producing academics who are not only dedicated in teaching and learning activities but also innovative and active in research, and are able to compete internationally to elevate their knowledge in the academic field. Since there a lot of factors that hamper lecturers' work productivity, high motivational level can become a catalyst in self-development to realising the aspirations and ambitions within the lecturers.

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